DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 450 760 IR 058 016

AUTHOR Parker, Sandra; Hare, Catherine; Gannon-Leary, Pat
TITLE National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs): One Route To Improve the Status of Women in Libraries?
PUB DATE 2000-08-00
NOTE 8p.; In: IFLA Council and General Conference: Conference Proceedings (66th, Jerusalem, Israel, August 13-18, 2000); see IR 057 981.
AVAILABLE FROM For full text: http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla66/papers/115-151e.htm.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Females; Foreign Countries; *Library Education; Library Personnel; *National Standards; Postsecondary Education; Professional Development; *Qualifications
IDENTIFIERS *National Vocational Qualifications (England); Scottish Vocational Qualifications

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the potential of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) to improve the status of women in Great Britain. The first section introduces NVQs and provides historical background. The second section addresses the question: What is an SVQ or NVQ, and what is involved in getting one? Mandatory and optional NVQ units for information and library staff are listed. The third section considers the benefits to women, including the ability to meet qualifications on the job, flexibility, exemptions for existing skills, costs, and career progression and development. The third section covers disadvantages, including jargon and complex language in the standards, time consuming requirements, and the lack of underlying theory. (Contains 27 references.) (MES)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original document.

ED 450 760

66th IFLA Council and General Conference

Jerusalem, Israel, 13-18 August

Conference Proceedings

Code Number: 115-151-E
Division Number: VI
Professional Group: Women's Issues
Joint Meeting with:
Meeting Number: 151
Simultaneous Interpretation: No

A.L. Van Wesemael

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs): one route to improve the status of women in libraries?

Sandra Parker
&
Catherine Hare
&
Pat Gannon-Leary
School of Information Studies
University of Northumbria at Newcastle
UK

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Paper

1. Introduction

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQS) and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQS) were introduced in Great Britain in the 1980s because it was thought that increasing the skills of the workforce was the way to improve the economic health of the country; to redress the imbalance as compared to other developed countries; and to co-ordinate a growing number of "confusing" qualifications. The Department of Education and Science in the UK set up some 160 organisations called Lead Bodies to represent occupational sectors and to lead the way in developing S/NVQs with particular responsibility for developing the standards of work-based practice for the sector. The one for the information occupational sector was the Information and Library Services Lead Body. The information sector is wide ranging and this was reflected within the Lead Body which was subdivided into the specialist areas of Information and Library Services (ILS), Archives, Records and Tourist Information. Each specialist area was represented by nominated professionals and practitioners in the field.

The ILS Lead Body started work in April 1991, but it was not until the summer

IR058016

of 1995, after development, discussion and testing, that the first S/NVQS from the standards were approved. The extent and diversity of the ILS sector is reflected in the suite of 11 awards ranging from Levels 2 to 4 and covering information and library services (IILS)(1995), records services and records management (1997), and archives (1997). Despite their relatively recent development, the occupational standards and awards have been adopted across the sector with the establishment of assessment centres and registration of candidates at all levels. The Information and Library Service S/NVQs were developed first and, to date, they have had the greatest uptake. By December 1998 ILS S/NVQs had evolved to the extent that there were 165 assessment centres with the numbers of candidates at each site ranging from a minimum of one to a maximum of 26 (level 2), 29 (level 3) and 8 (level 4).

These NVQ's have been particularly helpful to paraprofessional or Library technician staff to achieve recognition. They often have long periods of service with key skills, but have no formal qualifications. Currently the registration for these awards is at least 90% women.

2. What is an SVQ or NVQ and what is involved in getting one?

NVQs measure skills that are directly relevant to the everyday world of work (Arundale 1995). They are competence based (Dakers 1994b and 1994c) and measure whether a person can carry out his or her work to the defined national standards of current best practice (Dakers 1997b). They emphasize achievement rather than theory (Trevett 1996b) but candidates have to show both that they have the skills to do the job and that they have the necessary knowledge to do it well and in a range of circumstances. (Scarsbrook in Trevett 1996b).

The NVQ standards are broken down into five levels which range from the application of basic skills (at levels I and 2); level 3 for more senior staff with greater responsibility including the control and guidance of others (Herzog 1996); to a high degree of professional understanding comparable to full academic degrees at level 4 (Arundale 1995a and 1995b). Further details of each level are given in a number of articles including Dakers & Hare (1996), Fries (1995), Harrison (1994), Herzog (1995). Level 2 is currently the first Information and Library level used and is intended for library assistants. It is particularly helpful as induction training. It covers processing materials, identifying and providing information and working with users. Level 3 is intended for senior library assistants or information officers/executives and covers providing and organising information, solving problems for users and maintaining quality standards together with five optional units. Level 4 is intended for library, customer services or information managers. (Lobban 1997) A level 5 qualification for senior managers was under discussion but appears to have been shelved.

At each level, NVQs are broken down into a series of units, which describe separate functions within an individual's job role (Stott 1996). These are grouped into Core and Mandatory Units, where work is considered as essential regardless of the kind of service being provided, and Optional Units which allow for specialist activities, such as the IT units for someone working in a hi-tech Business Information Unit (Trevett 1997d). For example at level 2 for information and library staff the Mandatory Units are:

- Process material for use.
- Identify and provide information/material required by user.

- Develop positive working relationships with customers.

Optional Units are:

- Maintain arrangement of information/material.
- Secure information/material.
- Contribute to the maintenance of a supportive environment for users.
- Direct users.
- Issue and recover loan material.
- Maintain data in a computer system.

(Information and Library Services Lead Body. Information Organisations and Libraries: Scottish and National Vocational Qualifications levels 2-4. NB: These awards are due to be revised in January 2001).

Units are further broken down into a number of elements, usually from two to five elements. The element is the smallest assessable component of an NVQ, although it cannot gain independent certification or be transferable: the unit is the smallest component which can be transferred (Herzog 1996).

Each element contains statements about performance criteria, range and underpinning knowledge and understanding, and assessment guidance. [To gain an ILS S/NVQ at level 2, for example, the candidate must provide evidence for each element of the six units, which meets the requirements of those elements (Stott 1996)].

Each unit is a 'mini qualification' and an individual can take just one or two units from an NVQ if this suits their purpose. They could combine units from different NVQs if this was valuable for them. They will be awarded the full NVQ only if they complete all the core and mandatory units designated for that level NVQ but, where they prefer to 'pick and mix' their own units, they get a certificate for each unit they have successfully completed (Herzog 1996)

3. The benefits to women

On the job

A benefit frequently referred to is not having to take extended time off the job (Harrison 1994). Coker (1997) found enthusiasm for a flexible and accessible qualification equivalent to a professional one that can be acquired on the job. Goulding & Kerslake (1996) feel NVQs may give flexible workers a chance to gain qualifications. This is particularly suitable for part-time workers and volunteers many of whom are women (Fries 1995). A manager quoted in Coker (1997) from a survey by Drury suggests NVQs will give recognition to people not able to study for other qualifications e.g. City & Guilds or Library and Information Assistants' Certificate (LIAC), which requires time-off, travel and study time.

Dakers (1995b), while promoting the value of NVQs for those working in United Kingdom school libraries, stresses the opportunity they offer for people to obtain qualifications in recognition for skills acquired while doing a particular job. "NVQs are tailor-made for those who cannot get away to do some formal training course because they have to mind the library. They are ideal for the part-time employee."

Flexible

Another benefit of S/NVQs for the individual is that they are flexible and can be achieved at a pace to suit the trainee (Harrison 1994) Anyone can take an NVQ regardless of age, sex, language or ability. Units can be gained gradually as there are no set timescales (Jones 1994) (although in practice certain deadlines may be useful). Fries (1995) believes that S/NVQS are useful for the voluntary sector where limited resources, part-time workers and volunteers are the norm and she also suggests it would be possible for individuals to undertake an S/NVQ even if it were not offered by their employer if they were prepared to pay for it themselves. However in Goulding & Kerslake's survey (1996) a school library manager believed that the work the qualifications involves for part-time workers who already gave a lot to their jobs, and have families would be just too much.

Existing skills may gain exemption

Existing skills or qualifications may gain exemption from some parts of NVQs by means Accreditation of Prior Leaming (APL) (Information and Library Services Lead Body 1996h). There is however some debate as to how far APL is possible (Totterdell 1997 and Scarsbrook 1997).

Costs

Because NVQ's are most often assessed in the workplace and are relevant to employers needs, the employer will often meet costs. Also they do not entail leaving employment and undertaking a expensive College education.

Career progression and development

Dakers (1993) and Trevett (1997) suggest that NVQ's offer, for the first time career development for the para-professional. Dakers also claims that those staff who can see internal means of career progression are more likely to stay in post and be absent less often. The Assessment Centre at the University of Northumbria, School of Information Studies offers a linked qualification. Candidates completing NVQ level 4 are then qualified to enter the BSc Information and Communication degree in the third (final) year, their NVQ being accredited as equivalent to the first two years of the degree syllabus. The only candidate to have progressed so far and about to obtain a degree by this route is a mature woman working in an academic library.

4. Some disadvantages

Jargon and language

This is an oft-repeated criticism, as the standards are national and sometimes function across many occupations sectors e.g. Customer care, the language is sometimes complex and jargon based. This has improved with new editions.

Time consuming

Because they are intended to be pursued while doing a job, some employers and candidates under estimate the amount of time that is needed. 'I've just started doing the NVQ but I am finding it difficult to find the time' On average the research found that Level 2 took 6 month to complete, Level 3 two years and level 4 four years. Candidates found that they needed 4-5 hours a week to

complete the work. Some employers gave half a day as study leave and this was found to be very successful.

Practical versus underlying theory

It is the emphasis on practical competence that has led to criticism from those who are worried about lack of theoretical underpinning. Elkin (1994) dislikes the mechanistic approach "and lack of. encouragement of any vision or broadening of horizons". Wilson (1995) worries that there is no mention of the need for imagination, creativity, innovation or analytical thought, especially for managers at levels 4 and 5. Muddiman (1995) thinks that "...2001 may well see in libraries the emergence of the jobber, who knows how but not why".

However, the performance evidence refers to the desirability of portfolios showing underpinning knowledge and understanding: to carry out a task well, people need to know why they are doing it and what to do when things go wrong. Totterdell (1997) writes about using City and Guilds to provide theoretical underpinning for level 2 and, to a lesser extent, level 3. She says that Sandra Parker (LA president in 1996) "was right when she described ILS-NVQs as being as well as rather than instead of existing qualifications". Trevett (1996b) suggests that underpinning knowledge and skills gaps are best delivered in the workplace via training methods such as induction periods, working alongside more experienced staff, coaching, organised job swaps, staff meetings, study sessions and open learning.

5.Conclusions

Women have long formed the majority of the workforce in this sector. They have largely been undervalued, underpaid, under-educated and under-trained. This competence-based form of on the job training undoubtedly offers a way forward that has not been possible before. It is hoped that employers will welcome these developments and support women appropriately with fees and the necessary time to achieve recognition of their skills.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arundale, J. (1995a) National Vocational Qualifications: What's it all about? *Assignation*, 13 (1), p.34-6. refs.

Arundale, J. (1995b) Getting your S/NVO: a guide for candidates in the information and library sector. Library Association Publishing.

Dakers, H. (1997b) The library as a key to exploiting economic resources: global competence in the library oils the lock. EFLA *Journal*, 23 (1), p.30-5. il.refs.

Dakers, H. (I 996c) *NVOs and how to get them*. Kogan Page.

Dakers, H. (1995b) National Vocational Qualifications. What is in them for school libraries? School *Librarian*, 43 (2), p.45.

Dakers, H. (1994b) A matter of competence. *Library Association Record*, 98(6), p.446-7.

Dakers, H. and Hare, C.E. (1996) NVQs for records management revealed. *Records Management Journal*, 6 (2), p. I 1 1-29. refs.

Elkin, J. (1994) Higher-level NVQS: cause for concern? *Librarian Career Development*, 2 (4), p.32-3.

Fries, C. (1995) National Vocational Qualifications (NVQS) for information and library services. *Assignation*, 12 (3), p.5-7.

Goulding, A. and Kerslake, E. (1996) Flexible information workers: training and equal opportunities. *Librarian Career Development*, 4 (2), p.5-12. refs.

Hare, C. and Rhodes, G. (1996) Forging a partnership with HE. *Library Association Record*, (9), p.466-8. il.refs.

Harrison, C.T. (1994) S/NVQs and professional qualifications in library and information Services. *Librarian Career Development*, 2 (4), p.24-8. refs.

Herzog, J. (1 996) Implementing S/NVQs in the information and library sector: a guide for employers. *Library Association Publishing*.

Herzog, J. (I 995) The development of NVQs/SVQs. *School Librarian*, 43 (2), p.46-8.

Information and Library services Lead Body (1997) Time to review the ILS S/NVQs. Newsletter, Winter

Jones, B. (1994) National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs): an introduction for library and information workers. *Bulletin of the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries*, 3 (3), p.3-8. refs.

Lobban, M. (1997) Scottish and National Vocational Qualifications (S/NVQs). In: *Training Library Assistants*. Library Association Publishing. Chapter 5. p.25-30.

McKeever, L.(1997) Customer care training at the new Bibliotheque Nationale de France. *Personnel Training and Education*, 14(2), p. 10- 1 2.

Muddiman, D. (1995) Information and library education: a manifesto for the Millennium. *New Library World*, 96 (1119), p.26-3 1. refs.

Scarsbrook, P. (1997) NVQ Comments and update. *Personnel Training and Education*, 14(3), p. 15.

Stott, H. (1996b) Review of Getting Your S/NVO: a guide for candidates in the information and library sector by J. Arundale. Managing Information, 3 (5), p.50.

Totterdell, A. (1997) NVQ'S: A response to Steve Lee. *Personnel Training and Education* 14 (3) 1997, p. 14-15.

Trevett, A. (1997a) Offering the ILS S/NVQs; some do's and don'ts for college library services. *COFHE Bulletin*, 81 (Summer), p.2-3.

Trevett, A. (1997b) Using the ELS S/NVQs. *School Librarian*, 45 (2), p.69-70. refs.

Trevett, A. (1997d). Taking stock: Using the information and library services S/NVQs for acquisitions staff. *Libraries and the Book Trade*. 6 (1). p.33-5.

Trevett, A. (1996b) Where are we up to with S/NVQs in libraries? *Personnel Training and Education*, 13(2), p.9-10.

Wilson, T.D. (I 995) Are NVQs for robots? *Library Association Record*, 97 (7) July, p. 38 1.

Latest Revision: *June 27, 2000*

Copyright © 1995-2000
International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
www.ifla.org

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

REPRODUCTION BASIS

☒ This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket) form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

☐ This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").